the Government had ordered a market intervention operation for procurement of 10,000 MT of natural rubber during 1997 by STC. This procurement has been further extended in May, 1998 to an additional quantity of 20,000 MT.

(c) In order to discourage indiscriminate import of used tyres, a minimum C.I.F. value restriction has been imposed on import of used tyres by the Government of India.

As Polyurethane is a material of versatile properties and also the quantity of polyurethane being imported is not substantial enough to pose a threat to rubber/latex, total ban on its import is not desirable and would affect the competitive advantage of the domestic foam industry.

(d) For providing a remunerative price to the rubber growers, the Ministry of Finance has already undertaken a study into the cost of production of Natural Rubber with a view to revising the Benchmark Price for rubber. The STC, who have been directed in May, 1998 to procure 20,000 MT of Natural Rubber at the prevailing market price not exceeding Rs. 34/per kg., have been directed to export the procured rubber and/or sell it only to the Advance Licence Holders.

Poor Tobacco Crop

1221. SHRI YERRA NARAYANASWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Tobacco Board has taken cognizance of the poor tobacco crop in 1997-98 season;

(b) if so, what steps the Tobacco Board has taken to assist the tobacco farmers of Andhra Pradesh;

(c) whether any financial assistance has been given directly by the Tobacco Board to farmers; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) Tobacco Board had authorised a crop size 110 Million. Kgs. of FCV tobacco in Andhra Pradesh for the year 1997-98 against which the estimated production is 118 Million Kgs. Due to unseasonal and incessent rains during Nov./Dec. 97 there was some damage caused to the standing tobacco crop & tobacco curing barns. Further, some tobacco crop was also affected by the brown spot disease. The farmers were assisted by the Board in securing additional crop loans for rejuvenation of their damaged crops and repair of the barns. A loan subsidy by the Tobacco Board to the extent of Rs. 3.90 crores was approved by the Government for giving assistance to the affected SC/ST, small & marginal farmers to compensate the losses sustained. Tobacco Board has also made available pesticides on credit to the farmers for control of the disease at its auction platforms.

(a) and (d) Direct financial assistance was not provided to the farmers.The financial assistance by way of the Rs. 3.9 crores loan subsidy was extended through banking channels. Details of assistance availed by the farmers are:—

(Rs. in cores)

Category of farmers	No. of farmers	Financial Assistance
Small Farmers	7919	1.36
Marginal Farmers	2676	0.53
SC/ST Farmers	383	0.10
TOTAL	10.978	1.99

Registration of Tobacco Farmers

1222. SHRI YERRA NARAYANASWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Tobacco Board does not facilitate registration